

WHERE CAN I FIND HOPE?**PSALM 130**

The psalm we are going to reflect on together today is all about hope. The word “hope” obviously means different things depending on what you’re talking about. For example, consider a couple who came to their pastor for advice because they were frustrated by their finances. They had kept a budget since they were first married. In fact, they’d had a budget every month for 30 years. But they were beyond frustration over the fact they’d never managed to stay within their budget. “Why,” asked their pastor, “have you never been able to live within your monthly budget?” They said, “Well, because something unexpected has happened every month.” “Don’t you have a contingency – some kind of built in financial margin – in your budget?” asked the pastor. “No.” “Why not?” The couple answered, “We never knew whether next month something unexpected would happen so we never budgeted for it.” The pastor then asked them, “Have you ever known anyone on the face of the Earth who didn’t have something unexpected happen in every month of his or her life regardless of whether he or she’s single or married?” “Well, no,” the couple admitted, “but we keep hoping!”

We keep hoping. Hope can be justified or unjustified, valid or invalid, helpful or fruitless. You’ve had your hopes dashed at one time or another. We all have had that happen. Not fun. The author of Proverbs put it well, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” or “When hope’s dream seems to drag on and on, the delay can be depressing.” (Pr. 13:12 NLT, TPT) If your hopes have routinely ended up on life’s trash heap, you can become reluctant to hope in anything or anyone. Nevertheless, hope is an absolutely essential part of following Jesus. In the past, you committed your life to Him in the hope you would receive His forgiveness for your sins. Right now in the present, you make an effort to live a life that’s pleasing to Him in the hope that by doing so you show God your gratitude for His love and blessing. You have a deep and profound hope about the future as well. You hope Jesus will return to this Earth in great power and glory and that you will enjoy eternity with Him. You can’t be Jesus’ follower without experiencing hope and expressing hope all along the way.

What’s unique about hope when it comes to God? How do you define it? What does it look like? Psalm 130 provides part of the answer. Let’s read it just now. This is one of those songs of ascent: fifteen psalms (120-134) that Jewish people sang together as they made their way up into the city of Jerusalem to the Temple for national worship celebrations several times a year. The first truth I find in this psalm is the simple fact that...

GODLY HOPE IS ALL ABOUT WAITING.

When you hope for something, you’re admitting that there’s something about your present life that’s less than satisfying. In fact, sometimes our present situation in life is like being in a pit. Whoever wrote Psalm 130 was in a pit. “From the depths of despair, O LORD, I call for your help.” (Ps 130:1 NLT) Whenever we find ourselves in some kind of pit we can’t get out of ourselves, we turn to God and yell, “Help me!” We come to the realization we don’t have the personal resources to surmount whatever challenge we’re

facing and so we cry out to God like the psalmist. “Hear my cry, O Lord. Pay attention to my prayer.” (Ps. 130:2 NLT)

It’s clear the psalmist’s specific pit was guilt – the inevitable result of sin in your life and mine. He didn’t tell us what he did; he didn’t have to. Every one of us here today is well acquainted with sin as well as guilt feelings. It’s a most unpleasant pit. “LORD, if you kept a record of our sins, who, O Lord, could ever survive?” (Ps. 130:3 NLT) Who indeed? All of us have found ourselves in that dark, deep, gut-wrenching pit labeled “Sin and Guilt.” We can’t excuse it. We can’t escape from it. It makes life miserable. It’s a constant threat. Even Paul, the great Christian leader, admitted to the ongoing battle every child of God has with sin right up until the moment we pass into God’s presence. “And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.... Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?” (Rom. 7:18-19, 24 NLT) Like Paul, the psalmist admitted He couldn’t get himself out of the sin pit. He turned to God in hope. He longed for God’s forgiveness and cleansing. He knew only God could remove the heavy ache of guilt in his heart.

Pits prompt you and me to put our hope in God. Sin and guilt is one of life’s biggest pits, but your pit today might have another name. Broken relationships with members of your family. Chronic financial worries and the stress they create day in and day out. Addiction. A serious health issue either for yourself or someone close to you. Uncertainty about the direction of your life and your future. Grief – facing the awful reality of someone you loved dearly no longer being here with you – can be an enormous pit. A pit is any uncomfortable experience or situation in life in which you feel overwhelmed. You recognize you don’t have the resources necessary to get yourself out of that specific pit. It defeats whatever will power or self-help efforts you can work up. A pit then has a way of forcing you to turn to God as your only hope.

What does hope in God look like? The psalmist provided one answer. It often looks like waiting. “I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word. I long for the Lord more than sentries long for the dawn, yes, more than sentries long for the dawn.” (Ps. 130:5-6 NLT) Back in Old Testament times, it was routine to have soldiers take turns guarding a city all night long from surprise attacks from enemies. For a sentry on guard duty, the night seemed endless. But, he also knew the night would come to an end eventually. It’s a little when you or I having a sleepless night. We toss, we turn, we get up, we read, we take a pill, we try hard to go to sleep. No matter how frustrating, however, we know the night will end eventually. We just know from life experience that night is not a permanent condition. Daytime eventually comes. A guard protecting the city at night, knew the dawn would eventually come. There was nothing he could do to hurry it along. Dawn would come at its appointed time. All he could do was wait patiently for the night to end. He had no power over the massive turning of the Earth or the enormous energy released by the sun. He had no influence on the dawn’s arrival. He just knew with absolute certainty that dawn would come.

Godly hope is like that. It's a lot like waiting for the sun to come up. Your present situation – or your pit – probably feels a lot like being in the dark. Godly hope is willing to wait patiently on God and with absolute confidence in God - for days, for weeks, maybe even for years - knowing He will act just as surely as the sun will come up in the morning. Godly hope is all about waiting. It's built on the conviction God is very much a part of our everyday lives, that He cares about us and the pits we are in, and that He's working vigorously and effectively to accomplish our salvation in every sense of that word. Waiting isn't about doing nothing. The guard protecting the city at night waited for dawn, but he had things to do in the meantime. Godly hope isn't about giving up and just being resigned to being in life's pits. No, godly hope means going about life's tasks and responsibilities with the assurance and confidence God will provide, God will intercede, God will guide, and God will work it all out in the end. It's the opposite of fretting and fussing over everything and living in a state of anxiety. Godly hope is quiet, calm, surrendered, and patient. It's content to wait on God and in God.

Right after World War 2 came to an end, Allied armies rounded up many hungry, homeless kids and placed them in large camps. There they were abundantly fed and cared for until they could be placed with relatives. However, at night these kids didn't sleep well. They were restless and afraid. Finally, a psychologist discovered a solution. After the kids were put to bed at night, they each received a slice of bread to hold in their hand. If they wanted more to eat before bed, more was provided, but that specific slice of bread was not to be eaten. It was just to hold. That strategy produced marvelous results. A child would go to sleep subconsciously feeling he or she would have something to eat the next day. A slice of bread at least. That assurance gave him or her a calm, peaceful rest. Godly hope for a follower of Jesus – our slice of bread, so to speak - is our knowledge and experience of a loving, faithful God. So, godly hope is all about waiting, to be sure. In addition...

GODLY HOPE IS ALWAYS WORTHWHILE.

Some people equate hope with pointless dreaming. The couple with financial management issues defined hope that way. "We keep hoping!" they said. Deny reality. Pretend it will get better. One reason godly hope is always worthwhile is the fact it provides real freedom from anxiety and fear. Godly hope is not about dreaming. Godly hope is never about escaping into some fantasy world in order to avoid the pain and discomfort of life's pits. Godly hope is a confident expectation God will do what He said He will do in His time and in His way. Yes, we do what we can, but we also commit ourselves to God, we take refuge in Him, and we're content to wait patiently and even courageously for the Lord to save us – to bring us up and out of whatever pit we might be in. If, by the Holy Spirit, you and I can learn to live life that way – to exercise godly hope that way - it will mean real freedom from anxiety and fear. Not freedom from endurance – we'll still need to work at hanging in there with God – but freedom from the kind of fear and anxiety that can cripple us. Godly hope knows every pit has a bottom. Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch lady God used so marvelously last century, said, "No pit is so deep that God is not deeper still." Godly hopes knows night will come to an end.

Dawn will come. The sun will come up again. So godly hope is willing to wait knowing to hope in God is always and forever worthwhile.

Another reason godly hope is always worthwhile is the fact it can keep us energized even when life looks pretty hopeless. I read about a piano teacher at a certain university who was known simply as Herman. One night at a university concert, a distinguished piano player suddenly became ill while performing an extremely difficult piece. No sooner did this artist retire from the stage than Herman got up from his seat in the audience, walked onstage, sat down at the piano, and with great mastery completed the performance. The audience was dumbfounded. Later that evening at a party, a student asked Herman how he was able to perform such a demanding piece of music so beautifully without notice and with no rehearsal. Herman said, "In 1939, I was a young, budding concert pianist. I was arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp. The future looked very bleak to put it mildly. But I knew that to keep the flicker of hope alive that someday I might play again, I needed to practice every day. I began by fingering a piece of music from my repertoire on my bare board bed late one night. The next night I added a second piece. Soon I was running through my entire repertoire. I did this every night for five years. It so happens the piece I played tonight was part of that repertoire. Constant practice is what kept my hope alive. Every day I renewed my hope I would one day be able to play my music again on a real piano and in freedom."

Sometimes life can look pretty hopeless for us as well. How do we keep our hope in God alive, fresh, and meaningful? Constant practice. Like that pianist, practice the spiritual disciplines followers of Jesus have practiced for 2,000 years. Spiritual disciplines is just a fancy phrase that means to keep on doing the things that allow God to keep pouring His life into you. Read and meditate on God's Word. After all the psalmist said here, "This is why I wait upon you, expecting your breakthrough, for your word brings me hope." (Ps. 130:5 TPT) Practice constantly through worship. Practice constantly through prayer. Practice constantly by confessing your sins. Practice constantly by living a godly life even when it's easier not to do so. Practice constantly by interacting with God's people and refusing to be a "Lone Ranger" Christian. Practice constantly by loving lost people and pointing them to Jesus at every opportunity. Stay at it. Being in a pit of some kind is no reason to abandon or give up on God. Instead, it's an opportunity to keep on practicing what it means to follow Jesus even when everything tells you give it up. That's godly hope.

The most important reason godly hope is always worthwhile is precisely the object of that hope: God Himself. Hope is only as good as what or who you hope in. Oddly enough, it's often hard to truly throw yourself upon God in complete trust. We put too much hope in ourselves or other people and get disappointed. Or, we give in and become disillusioned and cynical about life in general. We become afraid to hope – even in God. What's so great about God? The psalmist reminded us, "O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is unfailing love." (Ps. 130:7 NLT) Maybe the most beautiful word in Old Testament Hebrew is "hesed" which is used here and can be translated "unfailing love, loving kindness, tenderhearted kindness." No one English word captures its full meaning. It's the Old Testament word that best described God's

character as well as His attitude toward you and me: absolutely reliable, unfailingly loving, inexplicably gracious, and wonderfully kind. For the psalmist, the realization God loved him was reason enough to hope in God. It convinced him his hope was rightly focused on the only object in the entire universe worthy of his hope: God Himself.

Even though he knew nothing about Jesus and the cross because he wrote this psalm hundreds of years before Jesus, the psalmist pointed you and me in that direction when he spoke about redemption here. “O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is unfailing love. His redemption overflows. He himself will redeem Israel from every kind of sin.” (Ps. 130:7-8 NLT) When you redeemed something you bought it from someone else with money or by providing a substitute of some kind as payment. The practice of animal sacrifice in the Old Testament was one form of redemption. Instead of God demanding death as the penalty for a person’s sin, He allowed a substitute. The guilt of a person’s sin was transferred to an animal and it was killed in the person’s place as a substitute. The New Testament tells us that Jesus’ death on the cross was a far greater, far better, and far more effective act of redemption for your sin and mine. Jesus died in our place. He became our substitute. As a result, we experience freedom from sin’s penalty and its ultimate power. I like how one translation conveys that truth here, “O Israel, keep hoping, keep trusting, and keep waiting on the Lord, for he is tender-hearted, kind, and forgiving. He has a thousand ways to set you free! He himself will redeem you; he will ransom you from the cruel slavery of your sins!” (Ps. 130:7-8 TPT) That’s exactly what Jesus did.

Hope. Where do you go to get your sins forgiven? Where do you go to find purpose and meaning for your life? Where do you go when you fall into one of life’s many pits? Where are you going to spend eternity? Godly hope always ends up at the feet of Jesus. He is our hope. Hope is only as good as what or who you hope in. Godly hope has one and only one object for its hope: God Himself in the person of Jesus. That’s why the Bible says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Pt. 1:3 NIV) A living hope is worthwhile, yes? It’s hope in Someone who is absolutely reliable and faithful. It’s a hope that’s safe and secure. As the Bible says, “We have this certain hope like a strong, unbreakable anchor holding our souls to God himself.” (Heb. 6:19 TPT) Godly hope is always worthwhile because it’s one and only object for hope is God Himself in the person of Jesus.

Years ago, a school teacher who was assigned to tutor kids in a large city hospital received a routine call requesting she visit a particular child. She took down the boy’s name and hospital room number. She was told by the teacher on the other end of the call, “So, we’re studying nouns and adverbs in his class right now. I’d be grateful if you could help him with his homework so he doesn’t fall behind the others.” When the visiting teacher found the boy’s room, it was then she realized it was located in the hospital’s burn unit. She went into the room and found a young boy horribly burned and in great pain. She didn’t know what to say or whether to go or stay. Finally, she just said, “I’m the hospital teacher and your teacher sent me to help you with nouns and adverbs.” Then she fled the room not knowing what else to say or do. She felt like

she'd failed miserably. The next morning, a nurse on the burn unit asked her, "What did you do to that boy?" The visiting teacher immediately began to apologize, but the nurse interrupted her. "You don't understand. We've been very worried about him. But ever since you were here yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's like he's decided to live." The boy later explained he had completely given up hope for his own recovery until he saw that visiting teacher. His attitude changed when he came to a simple realization. He put it like this: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"

Godly hope realizes we have a reason to keep on hoping even though life has so many pits and we will inevitably fall into some of them. You don't send a teacher to a boy to provide instruction on nouns and adverbs if he's going to die anyway, right? What's the point of that? By the same token, you don't send your Son to die upon a cross and be raised again, if this life is hopeless for those You intend to save! Of course not! Every time you see the cross or think about the empty tomb, you and I should feel a surge of godly hope. The reason we can have godly hope today and every day is precisely because Jesus died and rose again. There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still. What's God's Word for us today? Godly hope is all about waiting. Godly hope is always worthwhile.